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TALES BY THE WAY

W. D. COXEY

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TALES BY THE WAY

A LITTLE BOOK OF ODD STORIES

—BY—

WILLARD DOUGLAS COXEY.

Author of "Zenobia: a Tragedy;" and "A Hypnotic Crime," and
Co-Author of the Anglo-Swedish Comedy, "Yon Yonson."

CHICAGO, ILL.

1898.

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The Village Coward.

TRENT WEBSTER was a physical coward. He never denied it. In fact, he often spoke of it as something that peculiarly distinguished him from the rest of mankind, and of which he was entitled to be proud. When the garrulous old veterans congregated at the store, and swapped stories of the Mexican war and of individual feats of daring, Trent listened with good-natured indulgence, and even smiled in a superior sort of way; but he never caught himself mentally emulating the example of those battle-scarred heroes.

When Lem Thornton came back from a surveying trip in the Rockies, and described his hair-raising adventures with Indians and mountain lions, Trent remarked that such things were all right for people who liked them, but as for him, he was too much of a coward ever to enjoy a visit to that benighted wilderness.

Trent's paternal great-grandfather greatly distinguished himself in that historic affair with the Hessians at Trenton, and every subsequent first-

born in the direct Webster line, whether boy or girl, had been burdened with the name of Trenton. It was patriotically presumed to serve the two-fold purpose of preserving the fame of the Revolutionary ancestor of the family, and of bestowing a legacy of intrepidity upon the possessor. The latest heir to the name was free to admit that in his case the charm had apparently been broken.

"Why, the world never produced a bigger coward than I am," he would say. "I'm actually afraid of my own shadow."

When Trent was an infant in arms, a nurse with a hooked nose frightened him into convulsions, and he never saw a hooked nose after that without having an irresistible desire to hide away from it. A caterpillar drove him into spasms of fright, and he could never overcome a fear and dislike for the feline pets that found their way into the Webster domicile.

He was constantly in fear of an accident; the buildings that lined the main street were, in his fearful imagination, always on the verge of tumbling into ruins; if a railroad train carried him safely to his destination, it was an unexpected blessing and a special providence of heaven; and he never crossed a bridge without wondering how long it would take to reach the water after the structure collapsed.

The only girl Trent ever really cared for broke

the engagement because he ran away and left her to face an infuriated bull, encountered during an afternoon stroll in a neighboring clover field. Once, when he conspired with another boy to wallop the town bully, he let his ally open hostilities and get thrashed without raising a finger to help him. His only excuse was that he was afraid.

So, when the newspapers began to be filled with exciting stories of war, and the sleepy village where Trent lived awoke from its lethargy and contributed its share to the war-fever and the general unrest, and held mass-meetings in the village hall, and passed resolutions tendering the patriotic services of the community to sustain the flag, Trent Webster was nowise in evidence. He was at home, in a tumult of apprehension over the possibility of being drafted. He shivered at the mere thought of standing up with a lot of other human ten-pins, to be bowled over by the cannon balls of the enemy.

"Snack" Bilkins, the patriot who presided over the lunch stand next to the post-office, offered an amendment to the resolutions, "excepting" Trent Webster, but the chair refused to entertain it.

"When we offered the services of this community in the glorious cause of American honor," the chairman remarked, subsequently, "we meant just exactly what we said—the entire

community. Trent Webster doesn't count."

Events moved on apace, the excitement grew, the headlines in the newspapers were more rabid every day; and one morning a recruiting officer came to town, and after a consultation with the mayor, opened quarters in the engine house. Then he hung out the stars and stripes, and the word went around that the village patriots were at last to be afforded an opportunity to enlist.

It was nine o'clock when the recruiting office was opened. The mayor looked out and saw a crowd of men and boys around the porch at Donaghy's store, but there were only three men in line outside the military headquarters. The first to cross the threshold was Trent Webster.

The mayor looked at him with mild interest.

"What brings you around here, Trent?" he asked.

Trent looked up, the picture of misery.

"I—I came to enlist," he faltered.

Astonishment beamed in the mayor's eyes.

"Enlist?" he exclaimed. "What on earth you talking about, Trent Webster?"

"Well, that's correct," persisted Trent.

The mayor whistled.

"Why—er—Trent, you're not a—er—a fighting man. I've always understood——"

"You've always understood that I was the worst coward in the place. Don't be afraid to say it, your honor. You won't hurt my feelings

any. I know I'm a miserable, sneaking coward, just as well as you do."

"Then, what on earth are you 'listing for?"

"'Pon my soul, I don't know. I'm frightened pretty near to death already, but I can't help myself. Something keeps hammering away at me to do it."

In less than thirty minutes everybody in the village knew that Trent Webster had been the first man to enlist, but nobody—not even his own people—had any disposition to magnify him into a hero.

"Bah," snorted "Snack" Bilkins when he heard of it; "he'll run the minute he smells burnt powder."

This was the universal opinion, and "Snack" could have made the same observation to Trent without arousing his resentment. Trent had not the faintest doubt but that he would drop dead from fear the moment the first shot was fired.

The nation's affairs were pressing; there was little time for drilling the raw recruits, and in a few weeks Trent found himself at the front, with a gun in his hand, and the ever-present dread of the inevitable first battle oppressing him like a nightmare.

His first experience under fire was in a skirmish. He had an indistinct idea that there was an enemy somewhere in front, that he was expected to discharge his rifle at that enemy, and that if

he ran away he would be shot in the back and branded as a "skulker." He remembered firing once as if by accident, and looking up into the foliage in a dazed way to see whether he had hit any of the leaves : then something whizzed past his head, and he heard the man behind him cry out in pain. Then Trent's knees collapsed, and he tumbled on the grass in a heap.

When the skirmishing party came back, victorious, Trent was leaning against a tree, feeling his trembling limbs for evidences of bullet wounds, and looking utterly lost and miserable. That night in camp the captain rated him for his cowardice. Trent hung his head in shame, and made no attempt to defend himself.

"It's true," he said, scarcely above a whisper, "it's true—I'm a contemptible coward!"

Two days later occurred one of those big battles in which so many went down on either side, and in which victory was purchased by the death of thousands of brave soldiers. There was one charge that will go down in history, and Trent was in the front rank.

Streams of lead engulfed the line ; but on it went, sweeping like an avalanche over the enemy's works. Trent was carried forward in a delirious maze. The cowardly legs that threatened to sink under him when he caught the first glimpse of those frowning guns, belching fire, suddenly became strong and brave. The bullets

sang in his ears. Men fell all around him, and he scarcely noticed them. Once he stood alone, with a gap of dead on either side, but he was not afraid. He dimly wondered at it, and tried to run a race with the rest of the line.

He loaded and fired like an automaton. There was a buzzing in his ears; his face was unnaturally flushed and hot; a madness seemed to take possession of his senses and deprive him of the faculty of reasoning. He yelled, and no sound came to his ears. He shook his fist at the enemy, and swore great oaths, and dimly wondered how that could be, when in all his life before he had never blasphemed. He was no longer Trent Webster, the village coward, but a demon, locked in a human machine, trying to break loose and to scatter death and misery and destruction among other machines masquerading in the garb of men.

Over the parapet he went with the human stream—over the guns—over the dead gunners, into the powder-clouds where the flying figures melted into the smoke. A frenzied face looked up at him from a mass of human debris, and the stock of his weapon turned the look of frenzy into the dull stare of death. A quivering hand caught at his leg with a drowning clutch, and the demon in Trent's breast gloated as he drove his bayonet into the heart of the poor wretch. A boy with the features of a woman cried for

mercy as he held up the stump of what had been an arm. He was swept under foot and his white face ground under the heel of the maddened soldier. An officer struggled out of a mound of mangled human flesh, and snapped his pistol at the captain. Trent's rifle cracked, and the officer's brains spattered him with a crimson shower. The muscles of a dead man relaxed and made the dead limbs move with a horrible resemblance to life. Trent sprang at the corpse like a famished vulture.

Oh! how he laughed—how he shouted! What blistering imprecations he hurled after the enemy! Was there ever in all the world such exhilaration as this? Swish—swish—bing—bang! Death everywhere! Everything crimson-red with the blood of friend and foe! Fire—brimstone—death—hell! Hoopla!

A sudden dimness blurred Trent's eyes. In a mechanical way he reached up and felt his forehead. He looked at his hand; it was covered with blood; there was a gaping wound over his eyes. The discovery made him weak, but he struggled on. The line was passing him. His head reeled, and that miserable weakness in the legs seized him again. Down he went, an inert heap.

That was the last Trent knew until he revived in the field hospital. The captain was leaning

over him. Trent tried to speak, but the captain motioned for him to keep still.

"You must n't talk," he said ; "I understand. You fought like a hero. I take back the hard things I said to you after that skirmish. You're a brave fellow, Webster."

Trent shook his head.

"No, no," he mumbled, "I'm nothing but a coward—a miserable, skulking coward. I—I forgot myself, that's all."

Col. Edgerly's Legacy.

THINGS went all right with Uncle Eph and Aunt Sally until Melindy married. Melindy was kitched girl over at Major Edgerly's, and between what she managed to fetch away from the "big house," and Uncle Eph's intermittent chores, there had never been any dearth of cold shoat and hot corn pone.

What made Melindy take a fancy to a raw-boned, lazy "niggah" like Sam Carter was more than anyone could understand. As Aunt Sally always said, "Sam wahn't no good, nohow," and his unwelcome advent into the family made an extra mouth to feed without any corresponding increase in the revenue.

For Sam was lazy. Aunt 'Liza Carter used to say he was "too lazy to eat." But that was an exaggeration. Sam never missed his meals. He divided his time between eating, sleeping and taking sun-baths on the river bank. Then he took down with the ague, and Melindy had to stay home and wait on him.

Uncle Eph was in despair. He was getting old, and when it came to hustling for odd jobs he could not compete with the younger "boys." When Melindy had been married a year matters were looking pretty blue for Uncle Eph and Aunt Sally. Melindy was sick, Melindy's husband was still shaking, and Uncle Eph talked disconsolately about "goin' t' de po' house."

"Ain' dah nuffin yo' all kin sell?" Aunt Sally asked.

"Dunno," he replied, "dunno, 'les' it am de ol' white hoss."

The white horse was the last gift of Uncle Eph's old master, the late Col. Edgerly. Many a time Uncle Eph had looked at the gaunt, half-fed animal, and sighed.

"'Pears like et ought t' bin a mule," he would say.

And when Aunt Sally would reproach him for "lookin' a gift hoss in de mouf," he would only sigh the deeper, and say:

"Well, 't aint natchal fo' no niggah t' keep a hoss w'en dey's so many mules in the worl'."

In time, however, there grew up between Uncle Eph and the horse a kind of mutual respect and interdependence—sometimes he half believed the old white horse was a mule masquerading in short ears, and the fancy afforded him a certain kind of satisfaction. So the thought of parting with old Dave filled Uncle Eph's cup

of bitterness to overflowing. But there was no help for it. Starvation stared him in the face, and the horse was his only marketable possession.

Uncle Eph's face had a drawn look when he started toward town with Old Dave. Aunt Sally stood at the door, looking after him, and wiping the tears out of her eyes with the corner of her apron.

"Dat's de ha'dest t'ing Ephraim Johnson ebba had t' do in all de days ob his life," she said.

Uncle Eph rode to town and took his stand near the market place. Old Dave had descended so low in the world that he did not even have a halter, and Uncle Eph stood on the curbstone and held the horse by a rope looped around the animal's scrawny neck. One of the boys in the butcher's shop knew Uncle Eph, and volunteered to make him a sign. The boy disappeared, and in a little while came back with a piece of wrapping paper, on which he had facetiously printed the words, "For Sail." Uncle Eph was profuse in his thanks, and tied the sign over Old Dave's eyes. The old horse did not care. He was stone blind long before Col. Edgerly went to his fathers.

Waiting for a customer was slow business. Uncle Eph's legs began to ache, and he sat down on the curbstone to rest. Old Dave became restless, too, after a while, and Uncle Eph held

the rope with a firmer grip, and spoke reprovingly to the horse.

Several times, when groups of curious schoolboys gathered around, they spoke slightingly of Old Dave, and made unpleasant remarks about the unorthographic sign and the prominence of Old Dave's ribs.

Uncle Eph endured it all good-naturedly until one of the boys threw a potato at Old Dave and hit the horse on the flank. Then he lost his temper.

"Go 'long deh, yo' po' mis'able tool ob de debbil," he exclaimed, wrathfully.

Uncle Eph's righteous anger was hardly cooled when a tall man in a slouch hat and top-boots touched him on the shoulder.

"What yer doin' with that hoss?" the man asked.

"Nuffin, boss—on'y tryin' t' sell 'im."

"Got a license for sellin' hosses?"

Uncle Eph looked frightened.

"Dunno, boss. Does yo' all hab t' git a license t' sell a hoss?"

"I reckon, yes. It's vendin', ain't it?"

"Dunno, boss."

"Well, that's what I 'low it to be; so you'll have to move on."

"Yas, seh—all righ', boss. A'm done goin'."

Uncle Eph's voice was very humble, and there was a big lump in his throat.

Leading Old Dave by the rope, he turned his face homeward. The horse was acting strangely, but Uncle Eph was too greatly worried to notice it. Old Dave staggered on his pipestem legs, and his head wabbled in a way altogether unusual with well-behaved horses. Then he came to a dead stop, and Uncle Eph was aroused from his melancholy reflections by a violent jerk at the rope.

He looked at Old Dave in surprise.

"Wha' de debbil's de mattah wif dat ol' hoss?" he muttered.

Old Dave rolled his hide into a thousand ridges, stood shivering for a moment, and then stretched his length in the street. In an instant Uncle Eph was at Old Dave's head, trying to get him upon his feet. Old Dave made one feeble effort to rise, opened his jaws in a final struggle for breath, indulged in another violent shiver, and then lay very still.

Uncle Eph was dazed. He looked up in a helpless way, and saw a crowd of men and boys congregating on the sidewalk. Several men came out into the road, and one of them asked him what was the matter with the horse.

"Dunno," answered Uncle Eph, looking at the prostrate animal reproachfully; "he nebba *did* ac' like dis befo'."

The inquisitive man gave Old Dave a kick.

"The critter's dead all right," he said.

Uncle Eph looked sorrowfully down at the old horse. There were tears in the old man's eyes.

"'Pears like eberyting's agen me," he muttered.

"What you goin' to do with it?" inquired the inquisitive man.

"Dunno, boss."

"Got any money?"

"No, boss."

"I'd just leave it here, then—the town 'll look after it."

Uncle Eph cast a last reproachful look at Old Dave. Then he shuffled away, leaving the dead horse to the care of the marshal and the health board.

The journey home was toilsome and full of bitter reflections for Uncle Eph. There was a woe-begone look on his face when he approached the shanty, but Aunt Sally met him at the door, all smiles.

"Say, Ephraim," she called, before he had fairly crossed the clearing, "come yander, quick. Dah's bin grea' doin's in dis yere house t'-day."

Uncle Eph wearily approached the door.

"Wha' 's happened?"

"Wha' 's happened? Why, sakes alive, niggah, ain' yo' got no 'spection 'bout yo' 't all?"

"Dunno."

"Den I done tole yo'. Melindy's done gone

an' got a de' lilla baby boy; an' yo' 's a shu' nuff gran'daddy, Ephraim Johnson—yo' 's a shu' nuff gran'daddy."

Uncle Eph never smiled. He could not get the thought of Old Dave out of his mind.

"De hoss am dead," he said, simply.

A look of scorn came into Aunt Sally's eyes.

"What 'f I got t' do wif dead hosses on a 'casion like dis yere?" she exclaimed. "Ain' yo' 'shamed o' yo'se'f t' talk 'bout dead hosses w'en yo' own flesh an' blood am in yander wif one ob de bressedest lilla pickaninnies dat eber breaved de bref o' life! Ain' yo' shamed o' yo' se'f—ain' yo' shamed o' yo'se'f !"

With this parting thrust, Aunt Sally went bustling back into the shanty, and Uncle Eph sat down on an inverted tub and fell to thinking harder than ever.

Presently Aunt Sally's querulous voice came floating through the doorway.

"Ephraim Johnson," she called, "ain' yo' comin' in t' see yo' bressed gran'chile?"

Uncle Eph made no reply, but his gaze wandered out to the road and across to where the golden tassels of Major Edgerly's corn were waving in the breeze.

Aunt Sally came to the door.

"What yo' all done lookin' at, Ephraim?" she asked.

The old man's face lighted up a little.

"I was jes' a-thinkin'," he said, slowly, "I was jes' a-thinkin' dat Majah Edgerly's folks nebba *would* miss a few ob dem roastin' y'eahs."

Aunt Sally stole back into the shanty again.

"I reckon t'ings is a-goin t' be all right," she said to Melindy; "yo' daddy's comin' 'roun'."

And just then Uncle Eph came shuffling in, with the light still lingering in his eyes.

A Circus Episode.

THERE was great excitement in the office of the honorable mayor of Lost Creek. His honor had just received a telegram (collect) from the chief of police of Harrisburg, notifying him to be on the lookout for a couple of suspected confidence men who, according to the advices of the Harrisburg official, were then en route for his honor's bailiwick. The alleged sharpers, the chief wired, had attempted to swindle several Harrisburg business houses, in addition to the leading hotel, by claiming to be agents for the World's Greatest Circus, but they had been scared away before fleecing anybody on the strength of their "bogus" contracts.

The mayor instantly dispatched a messenger for Tom Samuels, the town marshal, and on the arrival of the latter, showed him the telegram. The marshal was all attention in a moment. He had read the life and adventures of the famous Vidocq, and Dupin and Sherlock Holmes were his particular heroes. He had a vast ambition to rival the noted sleuths of the big cities, and

he had arrived at such a theoretical state of perfection in the art of detection that he could furnish a plan of procedure for any hypothetical case at a moment's notice.

Hitherto the marshal's deeds of official daring had been restricted to the arrest of vagrants and serving an occasional capias on an impecunious debtor. Here, however, was a genuine city case —a case fraught with infinite possibilities, in which the marshal could distinctly foresee the distinction for which he had worked and dreamed so long. He was, however, too astute to betray his emotions to the mayor, in whose eyes he was a veritable tower of official conservatism; and so he merely puckered his lips, and ruffled his forehead, and plunged his official hands in his official pockets, and remarked with great acumen:

"This is a case that 'll require handlin', your honor—very k-e-e-r-ful handlin'."

The mayor opined that it would; and, having agreed on this essential point, the mayor mildly inquired what, in the judgment of the marshal, was the proper method of procedure. It so happened that in the fertile mind of the marshal a plan of campaign had already developed.

"I trust your honor 'll leave this matter entirely in my hands," he responded. "When I've completed the job" (his voice dwelt lingeringly on the word "job") "I'll report to you in full."

"Just as you like—just as you like," acquiesced the mayor.

His honor had great faith in the marshal. Perhaps he had some hankerings after Vidocqism himself, for he added, hesitatingly :

"Now, if you should happen to need any assistance——"

"I was just goin' to speak to you about that," broke in the marshal.

The mayor looked gratified.

"I want your official sanction to hire an assistant," continued the marshal.

The mayor's countenance fell.

"What 'll it cost?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Oh, a dollar or so."

"All right ; but"—and his honor tried to look severe—"no extravagance, Mr. Samuels—no extravagance."

The marshal hurried up-town on a trot. He did not stop until he reached the office of the Lost Creek *Weekly Courier*. The editor was out of town, and the foreman was cleaning-up in anticipation of beginning work on the next week's issue.

The foreman was locally known by the name of Edwin Forrest Thatcher. He was a young man with a theatrical physiognomy and a tragedy stride, and he had come to town with a repertoire show that had succumbed to bad business and an obdurate landlord. Thatcher was the

only member of the unfortunate organization who possessed a trade, and he readily "caught on" as compositor in the *Weekly Courier* office. After three weeks' service he had been advanced to the position of foreman, and was considered on the high road to reformation and entitled to a probationary measure of public respect.

It was to this histrionic printer that the marshal looked for assistance in his role of detective.

"Them fellows," ruminated the marshal, "might fool me, but Thatcher knows all about troupes, and he can tell whether they be show folks or not."

Thatcher jumped at the proposition to play detective in real life. It did not require the retaining fee to arouse his enthusiasm. He had played Hawkshaw "on the boards," and he was eager to go to his boarding-house at once and don his stage make-up. The marshal, however, discountenanced anything theatrical.

"It isn't necessary," he said. "What we want to do is to kind of mix-up with 'em, and then, when we've got our evidence, we can run 'em in."

The next train from Harrisburg was not due at Lost Creek until after six o'clock, and it was impossible for the suspected crooks to arrive before that time. The marshal suggested that, after supper, in the event of the suspects arriving according to schedule, Thatcher should drop around to the hotel and "scrape acquaintance"

with the "bogus" circus agents. When everything was well-primed the marshal would arrive on the scene and fire the mine.

When Joe Farrell and his assistant, Jerry Williams, agents for the World's Greatest Circus, alighted from the train at Lost Creek that evening, they had no intimation of the reception that was awaiting them. If they kept a sharp lookout for suspicious indications, it was not because they were afraid of complications with the town authorities. Their uneasiness, which was seen and remarked by the marshal and his assistant, was occasioned by a far different cause. The circus with which they were connected had encountered a considerable degree of "opposition" all along the route, and it had been a constant battle of wits and agility to see who would get into the towns first and secure the choice of bill-board lots and preliminary "billing." In Harrisburg they had only made "optional" contracts, in order to "take-up the town" in the event of the Great Western show getting in there ahead of the "World's Greatest," and it was this peculiar method of doing business that had excited the suspicions of the chief of police. The absence of any evidences of the "opposition" in Lost Creek was encouraging.

"I guess we've got a 'cinch' here all right," Farrell remarked, as they rode up town without discovering any new bill-boards.

The 'bus driver waited until the agents had registered, and then "struck" them for their fares. Farrell took the 'bus man aside, and in a mysterious whisper told him it was "all right" —they wanted to hire a lot of "rigs," and would "square it" with the liveryman later. The driver was satisfied, and promised to send his "boss" around to the hotel after supper.

When the circus men came out of the dining room Thatcher was on hand, and he approached them with an insinuating smile.

"You're the agents for the show, are n't you?" he asked.

Farrell merely inclined his head. He was suspicious of everybody in a new town.

"My name's Thatcher," continued the actor-printer. "I've just closed with the Dewdrop Comedy Company, and I'm resting here. Heard you were here ahead of the show, and thought I'd like to meet you."

Farrell unbent a little and accepted Thatcher's proffered hand. Williams followed the example of his chief. Thatcher produced cigars, and the trio sauntered out to the hotel verandah and sat down.

"Everybody's talking about the show coming," said Thatcher. "What's your date here?"

If there was any one subject upon which Farrell was uncommunicative it was the route and unadvertised dates of the show. Even when he

and Williams were "contracting a town" they refrained from disclosing the date until it was absolutely necessary. No one ever heard from their lips the name of the previous day's town or the next "stand" on the route. This was a subject upon which no amount of curiosity or inquiry could ever elicit any information. Consequently, Thatcher's question had the effect of arousing Farrell's resentment. He did not reply, and Thatcher repeated the query.

This time Farrell answered brusqely:

"I don't know."

"That's suspicious," thought Thatcher, but he kept his conclusions to himself, and led the conversation into a more general channel. Suddenly he asked:

"Where do you go to from here?"

This time Williams was the one addressed.

"I don't know," he said. "We never know," he added; "we get our orders each day for the next town."

"Where does the show come from?" persisted Thatcher.

Farrell had left the group and gone inside to inquire for a telegram. Williams ignored the last question and followed his chief.

"How do you size-up that 'guy'?" he asked, in an undertone.

Farrell threw a quick glance through the door

at Thatcher, and replied in the same guarded way :

"I'll bet a hundred to one he's one of the agents of the Great Western show."

"That's just my guess," said Williams. "He's playing 'foxy,' and trying to 'con' the route out of us."

Farrell smiled grimly.

"He's welcome to all the information he can get," he said.

When the two agents returned to the verandah they were on their guard, and Thatcher found them even more noncommittal than before. In the meantime, Thatcher's brain had been busy weaving a chain of circumstantial evidence around the "imposters." Their evasive replies, and now their apparent air of distrust and uneasiness, were undoubtedly evidences of guilt. As soon as possible, Thatcher broke away from the agents, and started in quest of the marshal. He found that astute official secreted around the corner, and awaiting with some impatience for his associate's report.

"We've got them," Thatcher excitedly exclaimed as he came up to the marshal. "They 're crooks, just as sure as you 're born. They don't know where the show goes from here, and they can't even tell where it comes from. Why, it's a 'cinch'!"

The marshal was disposed to be cautious.

"I'd better have a talk with 'em myself," he said. "It would n't do to run in innocent parties."

The marshal accompanied Thatcher back to the hotel. Farrell and his assistant were still sitting on the verandah, smoking. Thatcher introduced the marshal as a friend from Chicago, collecting for a reaper house. The two agents exchanged significant glances. Another man from the "opposition gang." Thatcher took Farrell in hand, and the marshal made himself agreeable to Williams. Whenever an opportunity offered they asked a leading question about the show. In the opinion of the marshal and his companion their evasive replies were more than compromising. They were conclusive evidence of guilt.

Suddenly the marshal's demeanor changed. His urbane loquacity was succeeded by a freezing official dignity. He arose to his feet. So did Thatcher. The two circus men looked up with mild curiosity.

The marshal had come prepared to deal with desperate criminals. He placed a hand on his hip pocket in a significant way, and nodded up the street.

"We want you fellows to take a little walk with us," he said.

Farrell looked bored.

"Where to?" he asked.

"The mayor's office."

"The mayor's office? What for?"

"You 'll find out when you get there."

Farrell's ire was rapidly rising.

"I guess you 'd better count us out!" he exclaimed. "We 've got no business with the mayor to-night—it 'll be time enough to see him to-morrow morning when we take out the license."

The marshal summoned all his official assertiveness.

"You 'll go right now!" he declared.

The circus men angrily sprang to their feet. The marshal threw back his coat, and displayed a nickel badge with the insignia of his office embossed in black letters in the centre.

"The marshal!" exclaimed the suspects, in unison.

"Yes, I'm the marshal, and you 'd better come along quiet, and save trouble."

"You don't mean to say that we 're under arrest?" asked Farrell.

"I reckon you be."

"What's the charge?"

"Swindlin'."

"Swindling? Swindling who?"

"Oh, come now—don't play innocent. Your jig's up, and you might just as well acknowledge it."

"Well, I'll be blowed!" Farrell exclaimed,

with a look of consternation at Williams. "If this is n't the worst that ever happened, then I'm a 'rube.' These people have got mixed in their dates somehow ; but it's no use trying to explain matters here. We may as well go along with them."

Meanwhile the marshal and Thatcher had held a whispered conference, and had decided that it would be safer to incarcerate the prisoners in the calaboose than to take them to the mayor's office first. Thatcher walked on one side and the marshal on the other, and the circus men were hurried away to the lock-up. News spreads quickly in a country town, and an excited crowd of men and boys followed them. The marshal hustled the prisoners into the calaboose with a broad grin of satisfaction on his face, and carefully padlocked the door. Then he and Thatcher hurried away to find the mayor.

In less than twenty minutes they returned with his honor. During the walk to the calaboose the marshal and his aid had related the incidents of the capture. The mayor unhesitatingly pronounced it a triumph of strategy.

"You 'll make your mark yet, Mr. Samuels," he said, as they approached the timber-walled lock-up.

"Stand up," commanded the marshal, as the official party entered.

The prisoners obeyed.

"What have you fellows got to say for yourselves?" asked the mayor, in a voice that trembled with ill-repressed emotion.

Farrell acted as spokesman.

"All I can say is that this is a contemptible outrage!" he exclaimed, loudly.

"H'm. What's your business?"

"Agents for the World's Greatest Circus."

The marshal broke in.

"Pretty agents!—don't even know where the show comes from."

Notwithstanding their awkward predicament, both agents laughed.

"I understand the whole thing now," Farrell cried. "It's all a mistake. We took you for agents of another show, trying to 'pump' us, and you thought because we did n't 'cough-up' any pointers we were crooks. It's a regular Comedy of Errors. I don't blame you much," he added diplomatically, turning to the marshal; "I suppose we did act rather suspiciously."

The marshal whispered to the mayor:

"Slick, ain't they?"

To Farrell he said:

"That won't work; you can't bamboozle me that way. I've been in this business too long to have the wool pulled over my eyes as easily as all that."

Farrell turned to the mayor.

"Your honor is too intelligent a man to keep

a couple of innocent people in a place like this all night," he said, insinuatingly. "Besides," he added, "we can easily prove our identity."

Farrell took out his pocketbook and displayed its contents.

"Here are any number of railroad passes, contracts, letters and other papers which we could not possibly have unless we were connected with the show."

The mayor was evidently more than half convinced.

"Why," he said, "this certainly does look reasonable."

The marshal drew him aside.

"H'st, your honor," he whispered, "that's part of the trick. They 've stolen those things somewhere."

The look of severity on the mayor's face returned.

"All that does n't amount to anything," he declared. "In fact, in my opinion, it's only another proof of your culpability."

The marshal nodded assent, but Farrell swore inwardly.

"Well," he declared, desperately, "you can at least wire to the show and ask for a description of their agents."

"It's too late now. There's no night office here. Come, marshal," turning to that worthy, "we'll hold the prisoners without bail for a hear-

ing to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, sharp. Mr. Thatcher, you are hereby summonsed to appear as principal witness for the prosecution."

The mayor's party then filed out, the padlock clicked, and the prisoners were once more alone.

"This certainly beats the Dutch," growled Farrell. "But," he continued angrily, "if they think they can keep me in this black hole all night they're badly fooled."

It was now quite dark, and the only light in the calaboose came through the barred window from an oil-lamp in the street.

The feeble light drew Farrell's attention to the window, and he groped his way across the floor and seized one of the bars. It was old and badly-rusted, and bent under his muscular fingers.

"Hurrah!" he exclaimed, "the 'jays' have n't thought of the window. The iron bars are like punk."

Williams, who had been watching his companion as well as the dim light would permit, approached the window.

"This is dead easy," he said, as he fingered the twisted iron; "we can be out of here, and back to Harrisburg before they know we've got away."

"There's a passenger due here at ten o'clock," said Farrell. "We'd better stay here until nearly train-time. The town 'll be asleep before that. We can get on the train from the opposite side

of the station without being seen, even if the marshal should happen to be nosing about."

An hour later, when the train went east, the circus men were aboard. As the train pulled out, they caught a glimpse of the marshal on the station platform, twirling his club, and looking complacent.

"He 'll be considerably surprised when he goes over to the calaboose in the morning and finds his jail-birds missing," said Farrell, with a laugh.

"But not half so much surprised as the show 'll be when they discover that we have n't made the town."

"Oh—we'll fix that. We'll wire that the license could n't be 'squared,' and that we had to cut it out."

As soon as they reached Harrisburg they wired the show for instructions. Then they went to the hotel and tumbled into bed, thoroughly convinced that they were the heroes of the greatest joke of the season.

And so they might have been except for one thing. An hour after they left Lost Creek the marshal discovered their escape, and informed the correspondent of the *Patriot*, who rode over to Shadetown, where there was a night telegraph office, and sent the following dispatch to his paper:

LOST CREEK, June 18.---This place is greatly excited over the

arrest and subsequent jail-delivery of two desperate swindlers, who came to town this evening with the intention of turning a few tricks on the unsuspecting merchants of Lost Creek. The men gave their names as James Farrell and J. Williams, and posed as agents of a circus that is shortly to exhibit here. By a clever piece of detective work, Marshal Thomas Samuels secured the most positive evidence against the men, and successfully landed them in the calaboose. During the evening the desperadoes succeeded in escaping through a heavily-barred window. It is evident, however, that the escaped prisoners are members of an organized gang of crooks, as they could not possibly have broken jail without assistance from the outside. A posse of citizens will be organized in the morning to scour the woods for the convicts, and if caught they will be summarily dealt with.

The day following their escapade the agents remained under cover, waiting for orders. Late in the afternoon Williams sauntered down to the office. Presently he came running back with a copy of the *Patriot* in his hand.

"What do you think of that?" he cried, pointing to the "story" from Lost Creek.

Farrell read it with bulging eyes. Then he threw down the paper and looked at Williams.

"Well, would n't that kill you!" was all he could manage to say.

An Aboriginal Coquette.

IT was common talk among the tepees that Singing Bird was a coquette. The old squaws grunted their disapproval, and some of the young braves had gone so far as to complain to her father, the old chief, Patonka-I-Yotanka. But Patonka-I-Yotanka could see nothing to condemn in the variable moods of Singing Bird, who beguiled the young men of the tribe by her smiles one day, and drove them to despair by her indifference the next.

"Let her alone," he would say; "the birds are happier for their freedom, and the stream that is choked will never sing on its way to the big water."

If Patonka-I-Yotanka had a favorite for a son by adoption through marriage it was Waubliiyo-Ta-Ke—the young Sitting Eagle. Among all the young men of the tribe he was the most prosperous. His ponies were the most numerous, his hand was the most skillful in drawing the bow; he could even throw the tomahawk with a deadly cunning that would have made him a war-chief

in the old days of the Dakotahs; and, despite the degeneration of the red man and the decadence of the martial spirit, he could boast of at least one scalp-lock, taken from the head of a white settler during the outbreak in the Minnesota valley, and only exhibited on rare occasions when there was no fear of detection by spying paleface eyes.

With a woman's perversity, however, the choice of the Singing Bird fell upon Yellow Crow, the most erratic young man in the village. He had neither ponies nor prospective ponies; he had never tried to make a trade with the white men at the agency without getting the worst of the deal; there was no scalp in his tepee, and his rifle never found any prize of fowl or beast for the tepee of his old parents.

But Yellow Crow was handsome. His limbs were strong and sinewy; his eyes were mild and kind like those of the good Manitou when he is pleased with his people; his glossy hair was beaded with dazzling, vari-colored beads, and even his blanket could not hide the breadth of his shoulders and the fullness of his powerful chest.

When Yellow Crow courted her, Singing Bird's heart quivered, and her breath came fast, but she laughed at him nevertheless, and he would go away perplexed, not knowing he had found favor in her eyes.

In the old days Indian maidens had been wooed and won under the watchful eyes of the wrinkled squaws, or more frequently bartered in marriage to the young brave who could offer the most ponies or skins for the girl of his desire ; but the ancient customs were passing away. There was something else to be considered besides ponies, and hides, and beaded gewgaws. There was the maiden's heart, and that could no longer be bartered away against her will.

Of the Singing Bird's admirers, Sitting Eagle was the most persistent wooer. When he went into the forest with his rifle the wild fowl seemed to be guided across his way and the rabbits stood in his path. Half of what he brought down was laid at the tepee of the old chief, Patonka-I-Yotanka, and the Singing Bird did not need to be told that the present was for her. When the white men from the agency came to visit the old chief, Singing Bird jested with them and waited upon them like a squaw in the tepee of a red man. Then Sitting Eagle stood apart with a fierce look in his eyes and a dark frown on his heavy face. What right had she to smile on the white men when it was written she was to be the squaw of Sitting Eagle? Of Yellow Crow he never thought. That Singing Bird might look with favor upon such a worthless brave did not cross his mind. She was the daughter of a chief. She would go only to the tepee of a chief.

Sitting Eagle did not know the real meaning of jealousy until the Black Bear came back to the reservation. Sergeant Black Bear, as they called him at the Indian school where he had gone to study the ways of civilization, had learned to read and write the white man's characters; he had acquired the soldier's manual of arms, and as a member of the school brass band he had mastered the intricacies of the cornet. He returned to the reservation with his cornet, with a certificate of good character, and an innate contempt for his semi-barbarous people.

Sergeant Black Bear's natty uniform of army blue, with its brass buttons, had a powerful fascination for the Singing Bird. Even the strange music of the cornet had a temporary charm for her. And Black Bear was also susceptible. He joined the ranks of her admirers.

Sitting Eagle was furious. He watched the Black Bear going to and coming from Patonka-I-Yotanka's tepee, with lowering looks. When he saw his new rival and the Singing Bird in company, his hand would seek his belt, though there was no knife in it, and he would think of the scalp hidden away in his father's tepee. He despised the white man and the white man's ways, and he felt the deepest contempt for any Indian who copied the customs of the palefaces. Black Bear's government clothing and civilized airs intensified the hatred he felt for his rival.

When they met he taunted him about them.

"Black Bear went away a red man," he said. "He comes back a white face. He no longer belongs to his people."

"Black Bear *is* an Indian," was the reply. "He is proud of it. But he has learned much. He knows that the only way for the red man to save his people is to have them live as the white man lives."

"Black Bear talks like the wind. There are lies in his mouth. He is a white man's squaw man."

The Black Bear's eyes gleamed.

"Why do you tell me all this?" he asked.

"Because it makes my heart bad to see the Black Bear growing away from his people. The old chiefs need their young men."

The ominous fire in Black Bear's eyes deepened.

"Lies come easily to the Sitting Eagle's tongue," he said, sneeringly. "The Sitting Eagle cares nothing for his people. The Black Bear comes between him and the eyes of the Singing Bird!"

Neither brave was armed, but in the fading light they instinctively clinched. The voice of Singing Bird broke in upon them. She was laughing—the same merry laugh that charmed and exasperated all her lovers. The clasp of the angry rivals relaxed. Sitting Eagle turned,

and, without a word, strode into the forest.

"You were going to fight," said the girl, approaching Black Bear.

He nodded assent.

"Why?"

"For you."

She elevated her eyebrows, and laughed again.

"That's what a couple of white men did, but the Singing Bird was not for the tepee of a pale-face. One went to the happy hunting grounds —the other is in the guard-house down at the agency."

"Black Bear will kill the Sitting Eagle, but he will never go to the white man's jail for it," he retorted, fiercely.

There was a tantalizing expression on the girl's face.

"The Sitting Eagle says you are a white man's squaw man," she murmured.

"Do you believe that?"

"How should I know?"

Black Bear swore one of the white man's oaths.

"The Singing Bird shall see!" he cried, and abruptly leaving her, he followed his rival into the woods.

Singing Bird stood watching him until his receding form was lost among the trees. Then she thoughtfully went back to Patonka-I-Yotanka's tepee.

Before Black Bear had gone far, he remembered that neither he nor his rival was armed. Quickly retracing his steps to the village, he crawled through the narrow opening into his father's tepee. The moon was coming up, and when he emerged again the light glinted on the polished steel of a pair of long, sharp knives.

"The Sitting Eagle shall have one of them," he muttered, as he took the trail into the woods again.

The Black Bear had not forgotten his woodcraft, and he experienced no difficulty in tracing his contemptuous rival. He found him a mile from the village, his wrath still uncooled, and on his way back to his tepee.

"The Black Bear seeks me?" Sitting Eagle said, recognizing the other in the moonlight.

"I came to find you," was the reply. "The Sitting Eagle must take back the words of his mouth, or fight."

"What is spoken is spoken. The Sitting Eagle will make his words true."

"Let it be so, then," said Black Bear, holding out the knives. "They are alike. Choose."

Sitting Eagle took one of the blades, and inspected it in the moonlight.

"It will do to kill the white man's squaw man," he said.

"And mine will do to rid the Singing Bird of a weasel," retorted Black Bear.

For a moment the rivals warily eyed each other. Then, with a fierce whoop, Sitting Eagle sprang at his antagonist, and aimed a blow at his breast. The wiry Black Bear caught the descending wrist, and held it in a vise-like grip. His own knife hand was seized by his muscular enemy. Pantingly, they struggled in the long grass—forward—backward—sometimes on their knees—sometimes rolling over and over in their fierce battle for the mastery.

Presently, as they struggled out of the woods, the grass gave way to a smooth flooring of stone, and the murmur of a stream could be heard in the hollow below them.

And now Sitting Eagle's brawn and endurence began to tell upon his antagonist. Black Bear's breath came in spasmodic gasps, and the clasp of his fingers wavered. With a final effort Sitting Eagle broke away, and then, quick as a mountain lion, sprang at his prostrate rival.

In another moment the sharp steel would have sunk into Black Bear's heart. A wild cry arrested the slayer's hand. He looked up and saw the form of Singing Bird in the moonlight.

"Don't strike!" she cried. "Would you have the curse of the Manitou upon you? Know you not you are on the *sacred stone?"

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*Pipestone, Minn. In the old wars between the Sioux and Crows, if either party was defeated, and could reach the sacred red stone, it was safe from attack so long as it remained there.

A look of awe came into Sitting Eagle's face. He glanced around fearfully.

"The Singing Bird speaks true," he said. "It is the place of the red stone."

"The stone dyed with the blood of a god who gave his life for our people when the world was young," whispered the girl.

Black Bear lay upon the stone. Sitting Eagle regarded him with the awe still in his eyes.

"Come," he said, "I cannot kill you here. It is not good to make our people suffer for us."

Black Bear tried to rise, but stumbled, and fell sprawling.

"The words of my mouth were true," Sitting Eagle exclaimed, contemptuously. "He is a white man's squaw man!"

The taunt aroused the fallen Indian. He struggled to his feet. The knife was still in his hand, and he pointed with it toward the trees.

"Go on," he said; "the Black Bear will follow. He will die fighting for the girl he hoped to make his squaw."

Sitting Eagle started away. Singing Bird stopped him.

"Stay," she said, "stay a little, until I come back."

The rivals paused, and the girl darted away. Several minutes passed. Sitting Eagle was becoming impatient.

"She is playing with us," he said.

Just then the sound of hoofs came to their ears. A moment later a couple of ponies bounded into the clearing. One carried Singing Bird; the other bore the familiar form of Yellow Crow.

The rivals gave a spontaneous cry of surprise.

"You need n't fight any more," called the girl across the open space, as they reined up the ponies; "the tepee of neither the Sitting Eagle nor the Black Bear is fit for the Singing Bird."

With an angry movement, Sitting Eagle started toward the girl. Yellow Crow raised his rifle.

"Stop!" he cried, "the Yellow Crow will protect his squaw!"

Sitting Eagle paused.

"His squaw?" he faltered.

The girl laughed merrily.

"Yes," she cried, "I go to the Yellow Crow's tepee."

As she spoke, her pony turned and dashed into the woods. Yellow Crow followed.

Sitting Eagle turned to Black Bear.

"We are both squaw men," he said, moodily.

Then he stalked away toward the village, with Black Bear trailing close behind.

The Lost Creek Claim.

JOHN AUKER brought his wife out to Pennsylvania in the forties, and settled in Lost Creek valley. He paid half cash for a couple of hundred acres in the valley, and gave ten notes, one to mature each successive year, at eight per cent., for the balance. It was a wild country in those days—sparsely settled, and a long distance from any market, but by hard work and self-denial Auker was saved the mortification of defaulting in his annual payments to Col. Hamilton, the speculator from whom he had purchased the land.

Once a year Col. Hamilton came to the Auker place in Lost Creek valley to collect the money due him, and it was always ready. One year he failed to come, but the money was laid aside for him. When a second year passed without the reappearance of the Colonel, Auker wrote to his creditor for an explanation, but received no reply. He finally concluded that Hamilton had gone abroad, and the new instalment was laid away with the former one, pending his return.

The Aukers had but one child. Gretchen was in her seventh year when they came to Lost Creek, and she grew up sprightly and strong, and sweet-faced withal, in the free air of the mountain-framed valley. Gretchen was John Auker's idol. He worked and slaved and denied himself for her. So did her mother. But Mrs. Auker was not physically constituted to endure the hardships of farm life in a new country. She sickened and died in the midst of their struggles and privations.

Thenceforth John Auker worked and schemed only for Gretchen. For her sake he wanted to be well-to-do. When five years passed, and there was no word from Hamilton, a great temptation came to him. He was urged to invest in mining stocks. The inducement was strong. The money saved for Hamilton was lying idle, and the prospectus of the mining company glowingly painted the certainty of quadrupling the money invested.

Auker took the chance; the company collapsed, and he came out of the venture practically penniless. The fear that Hamilton would return and demand his money prayed upon his mind. In his perplexity he platted his land and sold it off in building lots. None of the simple-minded purchasers took the trouble to look up the records, and they had no suspicion that Auker did not have a clear title to the land. He

netted more than sufficient to liquidate his indebtedness in the event of Hamilton's reappearance. When ten years had passed; when the quiet valley had become a thriving village, and Hamilton's absence was still a mystery, the mining company was reorganized. The declaration was authorized that new discoveries in coal and ore had been made, and that with new machinery the property could be placed upon an immensely profitable basis. Once more Auker invested every dollar he could secure, and again the venture collapsed.

In the midst of the worriment consequent upon his loss, Hamilton's son appeared. Auker had no difficulty in recognizing Newton Hamilton's likeness to his father. Young Hamilton informed him that the Colonel had died in England, and as one of the heirs, as well as executor for his father's estate, he demanded the balance due on the Lost Creek property.

Auker's confession of his unfortunate speculation and his inability to either pay the money or to relinquish the land, was listened to by the young creditor with rapidly-growing anger. When he had concluded, Hamilton accused him of duplicity, and threatened to bring suit for dispossession against the unsuspecting villagers. Ever since the founding of the village Auker had been its burgess. He was proud of his good name, and the respect of his neighbors was dear

to him. Besides, the thought that Gretchen would discover his weakness was maddening. Suddenly, losing control of himself, he seized a heavy hickory cane, and springing upon the surprised young man, brought the weapon down upon his head with crushing force. He remembered the look of mortal fear on Hamilton's face —the inarticulate cry for help—and then all was blank. When intelligence returned he was in his own room, propped-up in bed, and he was told that he had been delirious for many days.

Gretchen was a patient and never-tiring nurse. Under her care he gradually improved. In six weeks he was able to be around again, though greatly shattered, mentally and physically. The thing that militated against his complete recovery was the memory of his encounter with young Hamilton. The scene was always before him. He did not doubt that he had killed him ; but what had become of his body? This was an inexplicable mystery. He studied Gretchen's face, and questioned her as closely as he dared, but she answered guilelessly, and it was evident that she knew nothing of the young man or of his mysterious disappearance.

Remorse, coupled with the constant fear of detection, made the burgess' life a torture. The thought of Gretchen alone prevented him from ending his miserable existence. He knew there were other heirs of the Hamilton estate,

and the constant dread of their appearance added to his agitation. The thought of what would become of Gretchen when the inevitable exposure came, haunted him night and day. Just beyond the Black Shade mountain there was a strip of woodland which he still owned, and to which he had an unclouded title. It was worth but little, but he determined that Gretchen should at least have that between her and absolute want. He took advantage of her birthday to transfer the property to her. Gretchen had invited a party of young folks to spend the afternoon with her, and as the evening shadows were falling, the lawyer came, with the papers drawn up and ready to sign.

The lawyer sat at the table, and the burgess stood near by, with his face toward the door. Gretchen and her young friends formed a circle around the table, wondering what was about to transpire. The burgess had not spoken to Gretchen concerning the gift. He wanted to surprise her. Now he said:

"I wanted to give you a birthday present, Gretchen; and I had Mr. Hennig come over, so that everything would be done in a proper and legal way."

Gretchen looked half-frightened.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "It isn't anything very much—only a piece of land I wanted

to put in your name, and I thought your birthday would be a good time for it."

Gretchen threw her arms around her father's neck, and kissed him.

"You're the best father in the world," she said.

At this point Lawyer Hennig interposed impatiently.

"If you're ready, Mr. Burgess," he said, "you can sign the deed now."

The name and face of Newton Hamilton was seldom out of the burgess' mind, and that day they had haunted him with torturing persistency. He was thinking of Hamilton as he sat down to write. In the semi-gloom he could scarcely distinguish what he had written.

"There, Mr. Hennig," he said, as he nervously pushed the deed toward the lawyer—"there; it's signed."

Lawyer Hennig took up the paper, and rapidly ran his eyes over it until they rested upon the name the burgess had just inscribed. Then a look of surprise came into his face.

"Why, Burgess," he exclaimed, "this isn't your signature!"

"Not my signature?" faltered the burgess.

"No—you've written 'Newton Hamilton' as plain as can be! Now, who on earth is Newton Hamilton?"

With a startled cry the burgess reached over

and snatched the paper from the lawyer's hands, and then, with nervous eagerness, began to tear the document into fragments.

The young people drew back, frightened, and the lawyer, leaning over, with surprise and consternation pictured in his face, exclaimed:

"What's the matter, Burgess? What are you tearing up the deed for?"

At that moment the door leading in from the street opened. It was now quite dark in the room, but, outside, a street lamp threw a long ray of light across the portal. As the door opened the lamplight streamed full upon the figure of a man standing on the step, immovable, but with his eyes seemingly turned toward the burgess. The shadows that mingled with the flickering light gave an uncanny aspect to the motionless form, and every eye was turned apprehensively toward the door.

The burgess cast a searching look at the white face. It was that of the missing claimant.

"It is the ghost of Newton Hamilton!" he cried; and then fell fainting to the floor.

The illness that followed was not so prolonged as the first attack. When the burgess came to himself, and discovered that it was no supernatural visitor, but real flesh and blood, that stood in the doorway that night, it hastened his recovery.

The claimant domiciled himself in the village and waited until the burgess was able to see him. Naturally, Auker's strange actions had excited the curiosity of the villagers, and set the tongues of the gossip-mongers wagging. The unknown visitor was eyed with ever-increasing speculation, and every effort was made to discover what there was in his appearance to throw the burgess into such a critical mental condition; but so far the stranger had kept his own counsel.

When the burgess had become fairly strong, the young man came to see him.

"You are Newton Hamilton," the burgess said, and he was about to express his regret for all that had happened, but the visitor interrupted him.

"You are mistaken," he declared—"I am not Newton Hamilton, but his brother."

The burgess' heart sank. He could not speak, and silently motioned the visitor to be seated.

"You know, of course, what I am here for," continued Hamilton. "Several weeks ago my brother left home to visit you and to secure payment for the land you purchased from our father. I know he came here, for he wrote me of his arrival. Since that time I have neither seen him nor heard any news of him."

The visitor paused, and then, looking into the burgess' eyes, asked sternly:

"Mr. Auker, where is my brother?"

That was a terrible moment for the burgess. The truth came to his lips, and then—he lied.

"I paid him, and—and—he went away," he faltered.

"Then there must be some record of the transaction."

"No, no!" exclaimed the burgess, hastily; "there is no record. I paid him the money and received the notes, and that's all there was to it."

"And the notes—what became of them?"

"They—they were destroyed."

Hamilton took several papers from his pocket and held them up.

"That is untrue," said he. "Here are the notes. They were never in Newton's possession."

The burgess' head reeled.

"Well," he asked, faintly, "what are you going to do about it?"

"Secure the property or its value, and learn what you have done with my brother," was the answer.

The burgess despairingly bowed his head, and Hamilton left the room. That night the fever returned, and for a fortnight the burgess lay, weakly hovering between life and death. But once more he rallied, and one day Gretchen and a neighbor helped him downstairs, and into the front room, where he could see the farmers' teams through the low window, and watch the people moving about in the village street.

Some of the neighbors saw him sitting in the window-place, and the news spread throughout the village that the burgess was able to be about again. In a few minutes a crowd of old residents gathered in front of the house. There was a hard and unsympathetic air about them, and when the burgess looked through the window and nodded to two or three of his old friends, they turned away their heads.

After a few minutes, apparently spent in consultation, one of the burgess' nearest neighbors led the way into the house, and the others followed. The leader opened the door without knocking, and they all came in, quietly and respectfully enough.

"Mr. Auker," began the leader and spokesman when they had gathered around the burgess, "we've found out all about your transactions, and that you never had a title to the land you sold us. We had so much confidence in you, Burgess, that none of us ever thought to have the title examined; and even now we would n't believe there was anything wrong if we had n't seen the proof. Now, we don't want to be turned out of our homes, and there are only a few of us who can afford the expense of a lawsuit; and so we have come to you, to ask you to do what is right with us and with this man, Hamilton."

That was a moment of bitter trial for the bur-

gess. How he wished, with all his heart, that he had never been so weak as to speculate with Hamilton's money, even for Gretchen's sake. As he looked into the faces of his neighbors, all of whom he loved and respected, his heart sank, and the words died unspoken on his trembling lips.

"Have you nothing to say to us, Burgess?" persisted the spokesman.

"Ah, my friends, what can I say to you?" the burgess finally faltered. "I am a poor man—poorer than any of you. I would make restitution if I could; but it is impossible. I have n't twenty dollars in the world."

A murmur of anger arose from the crowd. A dozen excited voices began to upbraid him.

The burgess bowed his head with shame.

"Say what you like, friends—say what you like," he murmured; "you cannot say anything too bad. The worst you can say is not half bad enough. I am a liar—a thief—but that—that is not all——"

At that moment Gretchen's face came before him. Was it not enough that he should make her a pauper—that she should blush for the dishonesty of her father? Did justice demand that he should tell it all? Would there be any peace for him until he had unburdened his soul of the guilt that pressed so heavily upon it? Yes, he would speak—whatever the con-

sequences he would tell the whole guilty truth. Even Gretchen would forgive him when she knew he had sinned for her.

"Friends, let me tell you all!" he cried. "I am worse than a thief—worse than anything you can think or imagine of me. I——"

The burgess' voice sank to a hoarse whisper.

"——I am a murderer!"

The crowd shrank back with horror.

"It is true," he continued, brokenly, "the man you have respected and honored—the man you have looked up to as a friend and counsellor—the one who has served you all these years as your burgess—who has spent his best years among you in this quiet valley, in the shadow of these dear old mountains—that man is a murderer—a wretched, guilty murderer!"

The burgess' voice failed, and, exhausted, he fell back in the chair. A deep hush fell upon the crowd. They thought the burgess was bereft of reason.

Presently he revived.

"It is true," he continued, "all true—every word of it."

The burgess paused, and nervously pushed the hair back from his eyes. When he spoke again, it was with humble resignation.

"And now," he said, "I can't be your burgess any more. I have transgressed the law, and must suffer for it. Here I am, Marshal Tom—

I see you back there. Don't be afraid—I won't resist you. Lock me up like any other criminal. I don't deserve any mercy. I brought it on myself."

The marshal stepped forward, and laid his hand on the burgess' arm. Then he drew back. There were tears in his eyes.

"I can't do it, Burgess—I can't do it. You've always been a good friend to me."

"You must; it's your duty."

"But there's no proof against you—nothing but your own statement. We don't even know the man's name."

While the marshal was speaking, the crowd opened a little, and looking through the burgess saw Hamilton. Pointing his finger at the young claimant, he cried:

"He was that man's brother!"

A murmur of astonishment swept over the crowd as the claimant stepped forth and faced the burgess.

"Mr. Auker," he exclaimed, "look at me? Who am I?"

"Newton Hamilton's brother."

"You are mistaken. What I told you was a lie!"

"Then, in heaven's name, who are you?"

"The man you thought you killed—Newton Hamilton."

The burgess clasped his hands, and burst into tears.

"Thank God—thank God!" he cried, excitedly.

"After your attack," continued Hamilton, "you ran away, and I fainted. In a little while I recovered consciousness, but I was terribly weak and ill. Dazed, and scarcely knowing what I did, I left the house, and found my way over to the hotel without attracting any attention. The next morning, without telling any one of the assault, I took the stage for Shadetown. There I was seized with a raging fever, as a result of the blow you gave me, and it was several weeks before I was on my feet again. Then I made up my mind to deceive you, and by working upon your fears, compel you to raise the money. I came back, as you know, and pretended to be Newton Hamilton's brother. My heart was filled with a desire for revenge. I wanted to humiliate you, as well as to make you settle your indebtedness. Then I met your daughter, Mr. Auker, and like a sunbeam she stole into my heart and drove away all the evil thoughts. I no longer want revenge—I no longer want the land you sold; with all my heart I forgive you! But I want your daughter, Mr. Auker—I want Gretchen. Won't you give her to me?"

"Where is Gretchen?" asked the burgess.

There was a cry at the door, and Gretchen came running in, her hair flying, her eyes filled with fear.

"Father—daddy!" she cried; "what is the matter? What are all the neighbors doing here? Has anything happened?"

He took her in his arms, and stroked back her hair, and said, soothingly:

"Nothing, dear—nothing that you need worry about."

Then he pointed toward Hamilton, and said:

"Do you know that man, Gretchen?"

She drooped her head, and blushed crimson.

"Don't be afraid to tell me. Do you know him?"

"Yes, father," she answered, faintly.

"And do you love him?"

The blushes deepened, and her breath came quickly as she murmured:

"Yes, father."

"Then go to him."

Gretchen looked at the burgess for a moment. There was no anger in his eyes—she could see that—nothing but love and infinite tenderness. She stooped down and kissed him. Then, bashfully gliding over to Hamilton, she caught his arms, and drew them protectingly about her.

"Newton Hamilton," said the burgess, "take her; she is yours. God grant you may be a good husband to her!"

A Masquerade.

IT WAS a fortnight after the ball of the Musketeers before the Chevalier de Monserrat and his comrade-in-arms, Capt. Emile L'Hommedieu, met. The Chevalier had just returned from Normandy, after a brief sojourn with his mother, Mme. de Monserrat, with his wallet well-lined with the largesse of his doting parent, and with a sense of filial obligations dutifully performed.

Capt. L'Hommedieu's untidy appearance and melancholy visage forced from the Chevalier an ejaculation of astonishment.

"Mon Dieu, man, what ails thee? Been gaming, and bonded thy hopes of heaven to the Jews? Cheer up, mon ami, cheer up. Here's gold, and plenty of it to spare for the succoring of an old comrade!"

As he spoke, the Chevalier significantly slapped his wallet with one hand, while he confidingly rested the other on the shoulder of his friend.

L'Hommedieu drew back with a gesture of resentment.

"Saints! Were thou an apothecary thou wouldst prescribe gold as a cure-all!"

"'Tis worse than I thought; an affair of the heart. Thou hast been playing the devil with Cupid again. Inconstant! I thought thou hadst pledged thy troth to the lovely Mlle. Brunetierre. The best match in Paris—and a royal dowry; and thou, like a fledgeling on his first holiday, must dazzle thy senses with another pretty face! By St. Louis, I'll take Mademoiselle off thy hands, and call it a fair return for the good fellowship I offer thee."

L'Hommedieu's face flushed haughtily, and he turned upon his heel.

"Thy bray offends me; I'll seek for more congenial company!" he exclaimed, striding away, and leaving the Chevalier dumbfounded by his ill-tempered departure.

De Monserrat's face crimsoned, and with an angry movement he laid his hand upon his rapier.

"And thy tongue will get thy head in trouble unless it speedily mend its ways!" he called after the retreating Musketeer.

In a moment De Monserrat's habitual good-nature reasserted itself.

"Poor devil!" he exclaimed; "it must indeed be a serious affair that can make an old comrade act so churlishly!"

The Chevalier's brain was still busy, trying to

solve the mystery of L'Hommedieu's distemper, when he arrived at the villa of Mlle. Marchand. Indeed, Mademoiselle, with the intuitive perception of her sex, noticed his preoccupation, and questioned him concerning it. He related the incident of his meeting with L'Hommedieu, and the abrupt way in which it had terminated.

"Ah, poor Captain!" she laughed. "Is it really possible that in these prosaic times cavaliers grieve for the smiles their lady-loves deny? I thought all male creation—especially here in Paris—was blase."

"'Tis thou, then, who hath the key to L'-Hommedieu's affliction?"

"Why, 'tis simple enough; thou must have been blind not to have discovered it for thyself."

"Thou must remember I have just returned from Normandy," he remonstrated.

"True enough; that absolves thee. But thou was at the ball of the Musketeers?"

"Yes—and a gay rout it was!"

"Very," responded Mademoiselle, drily. Then she added: "The ball was the occasion of Monsieur, the Captain's, misfortune. Thou must surely recall a young woman, attired in the costume of an Andalusian peasant, for the honor of whose unmasking a score of gay Musketeers contended with indifferent success?"

"Why—yes, I do remember such a one among the masqueraders: a slight, graceful creature,

with hair, black as ebony, coiled over the most ravishing of olive-tinted necks and almost hidden under a mantilla of Valenciennes lace; small hands, and a dainty figure—not too youthful, and yet lacking the development of maturity; a carriage——"

"Oh, I see thou didst notice her," interrupted Mademoiselle. "I had not thought one so professedly indifferent to women could have made so complete an inventory. The Captain was another who did not permit the charms of the Andalusian to escape his admiring eyes. In the fervor of his flirtation, he neglected his fiancee, Mlle. Brunetierre, until, insulted and mortified, she went home in a fury of virtuous indignation, leaving the Captain free to continue his attack upon the Andalusian. The next day Mademoiselle's maid deposited a packet at the door of Monsieur, the Captain. It contained his letters to the Brunetierre, together with sundry fervent verses he had dedicated to her perfections, and half a peddler's supply of gewgaws and baubles he had picked up for her in his campaigns. Moreover, she has refused to see him, despite his most persistent supplications, by letter, for forgiveness and a reconciliation; and he goes about, morose and disconsolate, finding no pleasure in life, and——"

"——Picking quarrels with his best friend!"

"So thou hast said."

"Thou must have had the story from Brunetierre herself. Thou was not at the ball."

"Be not too sure of that."

"Why," hesitatingly, "I was at the unmasking, and hadst thou been there I surely would have discovered thee."

"Canst thou swear thou didst see all the dancers unmasked?"

"Why, now I think about it, when the hour for unmasking arrived the Andalusian had mysteriously disappeared—no one knew where."

Mlle. Marchand laughed gleefully.

"It was a rich experience—and a new one," she exclaimed. "As a Spanish peasant girl, hidden behind a mask, I had more Musketeers at my feet in one night than I could hope to infatuate in a lifetime in my own person."

"Then, thou——"

"Had the Andalusian stayed for the unmasking thou wouldst have known for a certainty whether or not I was at the ball."

"'Twas a marvelous disguise," murmured the Chevalier.

"Yes; thou didst not know how comely I was until my face was masked—nor the Captain, either. Saints! if Brunetierre but knew half the things L'Hommedieu whispered into my ear that night she'd never forgive him. And it begins to look as though there were no forgiveness for the Captain in any event, unless——"

"Ah, a plot."

"——Unless," continued Mlle. Marchand, disregarding the interruption, "we can make the Brunetierre believe it was all a trick, and that the fascinating Andalusian maid was not a maid at all."

"Thou wilt confess the imposture?"

"Stupid! That would but complicate the situation and win me Mademoiselle's everlasting enmity. No, no; I can weave a better plot than that! I can count upon thy loyalty?"

"I was never more Mademoiselle's slave than now," answered the Chevalier gallantly, seizing the lady's hands and alternately pressing them to his lips—an attack that was rewarded by a not too gentle rap upon the ears.

"Thy part of the plot," continued Mlle. Marchand, "will be simple. Thou must see Capt. L'Hommedieu again, and——"

"——Run the risk of being run through for meddling in his love affairs!" broke in the Chevalier.

"A moment since thou was my slave—and now thou dost object to being spit on the point of a rapier for thy mistress."

"Well, rapier or no rapier, I'll do thy bidding."

"Now art thou speaking like a true gallant—and one who would risk his head to aid a woman ease her conscience."

"I am to see the Captain," said the Chevalier, taking up the thread again; "what then?"

"Tell him of the plot, and—! Stay, thou knowest I have a brother?"

"A twin brother, 'tis said."

"A twin brother, as like unto his sister as one Dromio is to the other in Monsieur Shakespeare's comedy; so like, that were I to don his clothing, and he my draperies, thou wouldst declare that he were I, and I he, and wouldst back thy judgment with thy fortune. Herein lies the kernel of my plot; and, as though the saints favored our project, Gaston has only to-day returned from Brienne, where he has been entered at the military school through the favor of the king. Now, this is what thou hast to do: say to the Captain that the mysterious Andalusian was the twin brother of Mlle. Marchand, and that the adventure was merely an ill-considered, boyish escapade. Tell him to insist upon seeing Mlle. Brunetierre—to force his way into her house if necessary—and declare the imposture; insisting, however, that he knew the masquerader was a boy, and that he courted the pseudo-Andalusian simply to test his lady's love. Should the Brunetierre discredit his story and insist upon the proof, let him say that it will be forthcoming, and that she need but name the time and place for the trial."

"And then——?"

"Why, the rest is simple. Gaston appears in the costume of the Andalusian; the counterfeit presentment is so wonderful, Mademoiselle refuses to believe that the masquerader is other than a woman. Gaston craves permission to retire. Presently he returns, devoid of feminine draperies, and attired in his own military uniform. Mademoiselle shrieks, falls into the Captain's expectant arms, and prays for pardon; whilst a troubadour, hidden behind the curtains, plays a wedding serenade! What think you of it?"

"Magnificent! Had I thy head on my shoulders I should be a king's minister!"

Mlle. Marchand smiled graciously.

"Go, now, and find the Captain," she said.

De Monserrat went away with many misgivings, notwithstanding his brave show of words. He had already tested L'Hommedieu's temper, and while he would not have hesitated to try conclusions with an enemy or a rival, the possibility of an encounter with his friend was far from pleasing. It gratified him, when he ran into L'Hommedieu, to discover that the Captain had recovered from his anger of the morning, and was profuse in his apologies for his ill-tempered conduct. It was, however, a delicate task to acquaint him with the "truth" about the Andalusian without wounding his pride. No man likes to think that he has whispered words of

love into the ears of a mischievous scamp masquerading in a woman's petticoats; and the Chevalier, with great adroitness, acted upon the presumption that the Captain was privy to the deception, and knew that the "Andalusian maid" was only a pretty boy in skirts.

"Thy greatest fault," said De Monserrat, in conclusion, "was in not insisting upon an immediate interview with Mlle. Brunetierre, and confessing the trick."

"Twice twenty times have I tried, and twice twenty times has she refused to see me," said L'Hommedieu, dolefully.

"Try again," persisted the Chevalier, "insist —persevere—threaten. Drop a billet-doux at her door, warning her that unless she receives thee, within four and twenty hours thy bleeding body will lie on the selfsame spot. I warrant that will soften my lady's obdurate heart."

There was a less hopeless look in L'Hommedieu's face when the Musketeers parted, and the Chevalier went to his quarters with a feeling that the reconciliation of the Captain and Mlle. Brunetierre was more than half accomplished. The next day he was occupied with the solicitors on a matter concerning his ancestral estate, but the following morning he received a note from L'Hommedieu. It recited briefly that, after several more ineffectual attempts, Mlle. Brunetierre had finally consented to receive him ; that

he had confessed the imposture, and craved forgiveness, but that she had insisted upon the proof. Now he depended upon De Monserrat to complete the reconciliation by reproducing the counterfeit Andalusian for Mademoiselle's benefit, with Gaston Marchand in his original role.

The Chevalier took the note to Mlle. Marchand.

"It is just as I expected," said Madamoiselle, when she had read L'Hommedieu's appeal. "The Brunetierre demands proof, and she shall have it—oh," with a merry laugh, "she shall have it." Then, "Thou wilt see the Captain to-day."

"I can."

"Arrange to meet him near Mlle. Brunetierre's house this evening at early dusk—a little before candle-light. I will prepare Gaston for the comedy, and he will meet thee there. Be prompt, so that he may not be kept waiting, and run the risk of discovery. Under no circumstances connect me with the affair. I prefer to retain Mlle. Brunetierre's friendship. Now go. Be discreet. Thou and thy friend can depend upon Gaston."

The trim figure, with its graceful, girlish movements, that Capt. L'Hommedieu and the Chevalier de Monserrat escorted into the boudoir of Mlle. Brunetierre that evening had nothing convincingly masculine about it, either in dress or

contour, and Mademoiselle stubbornly refused to be convinced. Moreover, she insisted that she was being still further deceived, that the masquerader was a woman, and that nothing could satisfy her of L'Hommedieu's loyalty.

The pseudo-Andalusian, in a voice that undeniably did betray some masculine quality, interrupted Madamoiselle's reproaches by requesting permission to retire for a few minutes. Mademoiselle hesitated, but finally yielded to the solicitation of the Chevalier, who declared that in no other way could the matter be fairly put to the proof. The masquerader retired, and the trio waited with mingled sensations of curiosity and expectation for the "Andalusian" to reappear.

Presently a boyish voice asked :

"May I come in now?"

"Come," cried Mademoiselle, the Captain and the Chevalier in chorus.

The curtain parted, and a youth, dressed in the uniform of a lieutenant of artillery, stepped forth and saluted.

Mlle. Brunetierre emitted a cry of astonishment, and turned toward L'Hommedieu.

"Gaston Marchand!" she faltered.

L'Hommedieu profited by his lady's discomfiture to place his arm about her waist ; and, drawing her head down to his lips, he began to whisper fervently into her ear.

The Chevalier motioned to Gaston.

"Come," he whispered, "let us leave the turtle-doves to their lovemaking."

Neither Mademoiselle nor the Captain noticed their departure.

When they had reached the street, Gaston, who had kept his face averted from the Chevalier, asked:

"Is there a chair in sight?"

The Chevalier laughed.

"What!" he exclaimed, "a chair for a soldier? 'Tis only a short walk, and we can be with thy sister before the end of the hour."

"Oh, but I can't be seen on the street in this costume!"

"Saints, man, what art thou prating of? Are soldiers put in the Bastille these days for wearing the king's uniform?"

Gaston began to laugh—not with the roistering merriment of a boy, but with the exuberance of young womanhood.

"Oh, you simple!" exclaimed the youthful soldier; "and do I deceive even thee—the astute Chevalier de Monserrat?"

The Chevalier stopped, and looked at his companion with unfeigned astonishment.

"Mlle. Marchand," he murmured, presently.

"Yes," she responded, gaily. "Thou didst not think I was such a goose as to get my brother into an affair like this?"

The Chevalier bowed until the plumes on his bonnet almost touched the ground.

"Mademoiselle is a great actress," he said; "she should be in the king's company."

Then he hailed a chair.

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